

VZCZCXYZ0002  
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHBJ #3212 3351218  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 011218Z DEC 09  
FM AMEMBASSY BEIJING  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7004  
INFO RUEHOO/CHINA POSTS COLLECTIVE  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIJING 003212

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/01/2029  
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PROP](#) [PGOV](#) [CH](#)  
SUBJECT: CCTV STEPS IN TO SPRING EMPLOYEE DETAINED FOR  
EXPOSING POOR MAY 2008 EARTHQUAKE RELIEF

Classified By: Classified by Political Minister Counselor Aubrey Carlson.  
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The clout of a powerful organization, such as China Central Television (CCTV), can be more useful in freeing sensitive political detainees in China than a lawyer, according to well-known blogger Zhao Jing (aka Michael Anti, protect) and his wife Fan Ming (protect). In October 2008, Fan was released from detention in Sichuan province where she had been held on suspicion of "subversion of the state" after her former employer, CCTV, intervened on her behalf. Fan was detained while making an independent film about the aftermath of the May 2008 Sichuan earthquake. Although Fan had asked her husband to retain a lawyer to advocate on her behalf, Zhao opted for what he considered the safer route of quiet backchannel negotiation. In the end, CCTV won Fan's release by promising to air a documentary portraying earthquake relief efforts by Sichuan officials in a positive light. End Summary.

#### State Subversion by Way of Documentary Filmmaking

-----

¶2. (C) On November 28, PolOff discussed with well-known Chinese blogger Zhao Jing (aka Michael Anti, protect) and his wife Fan Ming (protect), the former producer of China Central Television's (CCTV) News Investigation (Xinwen DiaoCha) program, Fan's detention in October 2008 for "subversion of the state." Fan was detained after working on a documentary exposing problems related to the Sichuan provincial government's response to the May 2008 earthquake. The documentary was an independent project, not associated with Fan's former employer CCTV. Fan and a colleague were jailed for seven days in a Chengdu jail cell that she shared with a large number of female suspects awaiting trials for crimes ranging from fraud to murder. Some prisoners had already been waiting two years without trial, Fan said.

#### Efforts to Free Fan: Plans A and B

-----

¶3. (C) There were two possible tactics available to Fan's supporters said Zhao Jing. Plan A was to work through back channels and rely on the clout of supporters at CCTV, while plan B was to hire a lawyer and raise the profile of the case by contacting foreign media. Zhao strongly supported plan A, while Fan Ming herself and well-known CCTV reporter Chai Jing who was also working for Fan's release strongly advocated hiring a lawyer. Ignoring the request of his jailed wife to hire a lawyer had been a difficult decision, but the right one, maintained Zhao. Hiring a lawyer would have made local officials lose face and cement Fan's identity as a dissident, he argued. The result could have been a longer detention or a prison sentence and, following her release, limited job prospects with Chinese media. In addition to eschewing legal counsel, Zhao said that he had called contacts at Western news bureaus and asked them not to report his wife's detention. While Zhao argued that he had made the correct

decision, he also noted that many other dissidents who had relied on connections had not been so lucky.

#### A Deal for Freedom

¶4. (C) In order to secure Fan's release, CCTV officials had agreed to produce and air a documentary highlighting only the positive aspects of the earthquake response by the Sichuan government, Zhao said. (Note: This arrangement has not been made public and Fan and Zhao shared this information with PolOff in confidence.) In exchange, Sichuan officials released Fan and her colleague to a local hotel where they were required to remain for three weeks at their own expense.

Following her return to Beijing, Fan was required to meet with the police regularly to report on her activities. The one-year deadline for the government to officially charge Fan with subversion recently passed, and Fan said that she would soon return to work at CCTV.

HUNTSMAN